



## EXECUTIVE

**5.30 p.m. – 7.10 p.m.**

**7 January 2009**

**Present:** Councillors Morphew (Chair), Morrey (Vice-Chair), Arthur, Blakeway, Bremner, Brociek-Coulton, Sands and Waters

**Also present:** Councillor Fisher, A Little, Lubbock, Ramsay, Stephenson and Watkins

### **1. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2008.

### **2. RESULTS OF INVESTIGATION INTO GREYHOUND OPENING/GOLDSMITH STREET**

The Chief Executive, introduced the report and said she had commissioned an investigation by the Monitoring Officer on the Council's procedures and the Director of Regeneration and Development on the process by which staff came to be living in the properties and as to whether proper procedures had been followed. Following discussions with the Leader she had now commissioned an independent review of the Council's own investigation, which would be conducted by Philip Watson, CBE, former Chief Executive of Blackburn and Darwen Council. He came highly recommended by Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) and was not known by either herself or the Leader. This review would start very quickly and it was hoped a report could be brought to Executive on 21 January.

The Monitoring Officer presented his report and explained his role as Monitoring Officer. He confirmed that his investigation had shown there were adequate safeguards in place to protect the Council and members of staff but that these had not all been followed in this case, and had accordingly made a number of recommendations.

The Director of Regeneration and Development then presented his report. He said during his investigation he had found documented evidence of housing staff's one to one meetings, but could find no documentation on how the decision to allow staff to move into Greyhound Opening was made. Following interviews with former and present staff, he considered the decision to allow staff to move into the properties had made been so that elderly tenants waiting to move out did not feel isolated and vulnerable. Previous experience in Barrack Street indicated that it would be inappropriate to board up the properties. Allowing staff to rent the properties for a

short period of time was considered the best option, which would also generate income to the Council.

Councillor Arthur, Executive Member for Housing, Adults and Older People, said that she fully supported the investigation and hoped for a clear and speedy conclusion.

In reply to a question the Chief Executive said as part of a major housing stock review, there would be a review of the way decommissioning of sheltered houses took place.

Councillor Watkins, thanked staff involved in the investigation for producing the reports in difficult circumstances. He felt very strongly that much damage had been done to the reputation of the Council and there was a great need to restore public confidence. He believed there should be a thorough full and independent inquiry. Councillor Ramsay expressed concerns about whether reviewing the internal investigation was the right way forward. Councillor A Little agreed with Councillor Watkins that the trust and faith of the residents of Norwich had been damaged and welcomed the Philip Watson investigation. The Chair assured Councillor A Little that a full independent inquiry would take place if the external review indicated any shortcomings in the internal investigation.

The Chief Executive explained that all four Group Leaders had been kept fully informed on the investigation and had been updated on a regular basis.

Councillor Lubbock raised concern that meetings held between officers and Portfolio Holders were not documented and that questions had not been asked about the decommissioning of the properties by the Executive.

The Director of Regeneration & Development clarified that the meetings were recorded but there was no documentary evidence concerning the interim letting arrangements at Greyhound Opening/Goldsmith Street.

Councillor Blakeway, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development, said that the three Ward Councillors could have asked questions at any time about the process and the position of the scheme.

The Chair said that as there was disciplinary hearing process taking place it was currently inappropriate to discuss some issues. Any unanswered questions would be answered following the disciplinary hearing, which would be taking place later in the week. It was likely that Executive would invite Scrutiny to review what had taken place. He paid tribute to all staff of the Council for all the positive work carried out and their commitment and hard work.

## **RESOLVED –**

- (1) to adopt the Monitoring Officer's recommendations;
- (2) that the council's relocation assistance scheme for new employees ceases the provision of council accommodation on a temporary basis;
- (3) to commission an external review of the Council's internal investigation.

### **3. SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS IN AN ECONOMIC DOWNTURN**

The Assistant Director of City Development presented the report and answered members' questions. She explained that the Federation of Small Businesses had requested the Council to look at supporting its small businesses. Through the LEGI programme the Council would be able to offer a range of support to local people and businesses. Further support would be provided through the Council's payment system.

Councillor Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development, updated members on the LEGI programme.

**RESOLVED** to note:-

- (1) the progress made on the LEGI programme;
- (2) the Council's commitment to pay local business invoices within 20 days and to keep this under review until there are signs of improvements in the local economy.

### **4. PLANNING ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT 2007/08**

The Planning Team Leader – Policy presented the report and updated members following the meeting of the Local Development Framework Working Party on 8 December 2008 and circulated an updated Annual Monitoring report.

Councillor Waters, Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance, said it was essential to protect the development site.

**RESOLVED**, to endorse the action of the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development in agreeing the Annual Monitoring Report and its submission to the Government Office for the East of England.

### **5. WENSUM VALLEY TRUST**

The Head of Communication and Cultural Services presented the report and answered members' questions.

Councillor Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development said he was pleased to see this was now going to be a viable entity.

**RESOLVED** that a grant of £8,000 be made to the Wensum Valley Trust.

CHAIR